

The People of Alor

754 body and urinates on him. Thereafter the witch is able to eat out his victim's liver at leisure. Abdominal pains after contact with people in areas known for their witchcraft always suggest the possibility of having been victimized.

Witches also have the power of transforming themselves into civet cats and streaks of light which are seen at night. They can detach their heads and send them rolling about after dark. They eat small children and seem to be associated with cannibalism. At least one informant said,

[266] "They used to be the people who ate human beings." Cannibalism is an abhorrent and frightening idea in Alor. Witches also have a predilection

● [225] for snails—one of the animals, along with snakes and walking sticks (insect), that produce shudders of repulsion in the natives. The term used for witch is *palua berka*. *Palua* is the name of a small and harmless green snake; *berka* means bad or potent.

The only data I could procure about witches was in terms of gossip and rumors, some of which were recent and circumstantial. For example, a man who had died shortly after marrying a woman from Kewai was supposed to be the victim of her witchcraft. Malelaka even professed to have seen a witch once when he went to Kewai to visit his brother-in-law's uncle. As he skirted a bluff above the village spring, he saw the body of a girl leaning against the slope. The head and right arm were detached from the trunk and were floating about separately, looking for snails. Malelaka said that he reported this to his host and that the latter put a special medicine into the spring which would turn a witch into a normal person and protect normal people from witchcraft. A condensed witchcraft tale will probably give most adequately the flavor of local beliefs on the subject.

Tale of Witchcraft

539 Seven people from Murawating went to the village of Faliefa. Murawating and Faliefa were really one village, but there was a fence between the houses of the witches and those of the other people. The seven men reached the boundary. Atapada said, "If we lay aside our weapons, perhaps the people will not plot to kill us." Six of them laid aside their weapons, but Lanata kept his with him.

A young witchwoman came to Lanata, took his weapons, and placed them in her house. That evening she asked him to enter. Lanata was angry, but his six friends said, "Lanata, go up. We speak ineptly, so you go." Lanata entered the house, ate the food the woman had prepared, and slept with her that night. In the middle of the night the

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his belt. Fanseni sent for Manifani, who was noted for his boldness in⁶⁸⁵ burying lepers. Because of this specialty he always had in his possession⁷⁸⁹ a few odds and ends of mats, pots, water tubes, and such things used by the people he had buried. The following morning Manifani set up a bamboo pole about five and a half feet high. The end of it was split and in the crotch he wedged a piece of the leper's mat. A man who erects such a curse should not chew areca, smoke, or have intercourse^[784] with his wife on the preceding night. Manifani was paid one cent for his services, which indicates that financial reward was scarcely the motivation for the acquisition and practice of his particular skill. That evening Fanseni took a smoldering brand, rubbed it against the foot of the bamboo pole, and told the soul of the leper to pursue the thief and give him leprosy. He then left the smoldering brand at the foot of the curse.

The practical result expected from this procedure is that the guilty^[624] person will be frightened into returning secretly the stolen object. Out of many cases of this sort I never knew one in which a curse actually served this purpose. In the case of Fanseni this certainly did not happen. The following night his wife called that she had just seen a firefly set out^[625] from near the pole. Several people rushed out and tried to follow it, since it was assumed that the firefly was the soul of the leper searching for the guilty person. Fireflies are very numerous, so the people were soon confused and gave up their attempt to follow it.

Presumably no person except the one who puts up a curse may take⁷⁸⁹ it down. In theory even the owner of a garden or a palm should not harvest produce until the proper person removes the curse. Actually the pole usually topples over of its own accord and is forgotten or disregarded.

Should a person develop any of the diseases for which there are⁷⁵³ curses, there is surprisingly little interest in trying to connect the illness⁷⁵⁵ and a specific theft. Correlatively, there is in the culture no concept of cure through confession. Repeatedly I brought up this question in relation to particular individuals only to have informants shrug off the question with a casual admission that possibly they were suffering from some curse against theft, but never have I seen curses included in divinations used to determine the sources of illness. An illness is not a source of shame, and it will be recalled that shame, not a sense of guilt, is the dominant sanction in Atimelang life.

This procedure all goes to indicate the automatic and essentially im-⁷⁸⁹personal quality of curses. Also, although curses are in fairly common⁶⁸⁵ use and are of many varieties, they are probably no more numerous⁴²¹

¹⁵⁹ and I was alone in the house when I heard a noise in the thatch. I looked and there was a bird flying down in front of the privy doorway. In a little while it flew up in front of the entrance doorway. It was either a siak or a tinsopa (both birds favored by seers as familiars). I thought, "What is this? Maybe people are surrounding the house and want to kill me or steal me. What shall I hit them with?" I saw father's sword and fetched it. I went to the privy doorway and stuck my head out through the thatch. I thought I would escape that way, but I saw a large stone under the house. I was afraid I would hit my head on it if I went out that way. So I pulled my head back in and went down by the house ladder onto the verandah. Then I noticed a sheep father had just bought, running up and down. I saw that many flies were coming out of its anus. These flies collected and all swarmed up my anus. Other people could not have seen them, but I did. Then in a little while I saw a large cluster of spiders coming out of the sheep's mouth. They all came and entered my mouth. I cried and cried. I said, "I am dead. Flies entered my anus and spiders my mouth." Then Kolkari came down from her house and sat with me. She said I was sick. She asked why I was holding my father's sword. I just grunted. Then I thought, "Whom do I want to kill? Kolkari or Falanata (an old woman)?" I took the sword and went to Falanata where she was beating bark cloth. Falanata asked what was the matter with me. I said there were many enemies who wanted to kill me. Falanata asked where, and she hit the walls with her rice pestle. She said I had better give her the sword so she could kill them. I gave her the sword and she hid it. Falanata had hung up her bark loincloth on the wall. I looked at it and it was a snake. I saw the snake come down the house ladder onto the verandah. It came near me, crawled up my leg, and bit my penis. I yelled, "Oh, the snake has bitten my penis." I cried hard. Many people came to see me. Fankalieta said, "Did this boy stick his hand in a hole or climb up on a score pile, that a snake bit him?" He didn't know that I was sick. I sat in Falanata's house crying. Then Fankalieta carried me to his house. People called my mother and father. While I was in Fankalieta's house, I saw all the mountains away as though there were an earthquake. I sat swaying too. Then father came with two chickens, saying it was Manikaliet's sacred ^[753]hearth (us ara) that was making me sick. He swept off my whole body with the chickens and gave them to Manikaliet to feed to his hearth. When it was fed, I was cured. I wasn't really sick. I was just crazy and seeing things wrong. When one hallucinates like this, it is a sign that the sacred-hearth spirits are after you.

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¹⁵⁸ wife) went to Padatimang of Kawai and said, "One of your young kin gave Malakha arca nuts, and now he cannot sleep." Then Padatimang came. I took arca, rubbed my stomach with it, and gave it to Padatimang. He sat down beside me and rubbed my stomach, saying to the witch, "You can't stay here." He extracted something and put it in his basket. When I recovered, I gave him ten cents and he left. Then the guardian spirit of the village came to me and said, "Why do you want to eat that arca? They will pull off your head [a custom of witches]."

Then another time I went to Kawai to see Alurkopada. His daughter Kolata was fetching water. I looked; her head and right arm disappeared, and her body was leaning against a rock. Blood was not flowing at the stumps but had just collected there. Her head and arm were looking for snails in the taro, and she was eating them. [Snails were a source

• [125] of great revulsion.] I went to Alurkopada and said, "Father, when your daughter returns and cooks, I won't eat of it, because she was out hunting something in the taro." He said, "That child does not do right. If one wants to hunt something, one must do it secretly." Then he went to the chief, who gave an order, saying, "Another time you can't do this. Hereafter no young woman may step over a young man, and no young man may step over a young woman [a witch's system of casting a spell]. If that person does, he will go to jail, and we shall be shamed.

If you have food that is cold or old, you must not give it to others; eat it yourself. If the person eats and is sick, we shall be shamed." Then two ¹⁵⁹ people from Kawai who were not witches put medicine near the spring.

[789] When the witches drank that spring water, they became ordinary ⁷⁵⁴ people. They put the medicine in a bamboo tube with a hole in the joint, and the water from the spring flowed through the medicine and out the hole. Before this, when their husbands were away, women ate their own children's livers and substituted tuber leaves for them. When their husbands slept they would step over them, and that would make their husbands sleep deeply. Then they would take tuber leaves and put them in place of their husbands' livers. They took out the livers and cooked and ate them. When they did this, they ordered their husbands to go stay with their mothers and fathers. [That is, they ordered ¹⁶⁰ them to leave for their own villages so they would not die in Kawai, since this would create suspicion. Note that the informant spoke of witches in female terms, although they were of both sexes. He even acted as though residence were matrilocal, in order to place blame on women.]

[I asked if he remembered any castration threats.] No, but when my